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Two Texans Play Role in LaRouche Case

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HORSESHOE BAY, Tex.—When the federal government wanted to learn more about the shadowy, conspiracy-obsessed world of intrigue traveled by political extremist Lyndon H. LaRouche Jr., it talked to people who knew the terrain: two swashbuckling Texans who for years have made the world of conspiracy and intrigue their natural habitat.

Gary Howard and Ronald Tucker emerged two weeks ago as key figures in the continuing federal conspiracy trial against LaRouche in Boston when documents released in the case seemed to bolster a central theme of the LaRouche group's defense: that the government secretly tried to infiltrate the group at the same time that officials assembled their criminal case against the perennial presidential candidate.

The two longtime government informants said they were asked in October 1984 by the FBI and the CIA if they would be willing to penetrate and gather information about the Loudoun County-based LaRouche organization. But Howard and Tucker, in an interview in this resort community west of Austin, said the infiltration was aborted before it got under way because government agents did not give the go-ahead.

The emergence of Howard and Tucker has provided a strange twist in a trial already noteworthy for exotic characters and unexpected contortions. The Texans, who were key informants several years ago in highly publicized cases for the U.S. Customs Service, said they have operated for years as government informants involving terrorist organizations and that they were once contacted by the family of Andrei Sakharov concerning a plot to help free the political dissident from the Soviet Union.

Some federal officials and others familiar with the proposed infiltration of the LaRouche organization acknowledge that a meeting between federal agents and the two Texans took place, but they dispute Howard and Tucker's contention that it was the government who initiated the meeting. Sources say it

was Howard and Tucker or their attorney who sought the contact.

The FBI and the CIA, whose representatives were alleged to have been present in the Washington law office where Howard and Tucker claimed the LaRouche penetration was first discussed, have declined to comment. One source said no CIA representative was present.

Despite Howard's and Tucker's statements that the infiltration never actually occurred, the defense insists that there may yet be evidence of a politically motivated government vendetta.

"Certainly it has implications for the case," said William Moffitt, an attorney for Jeffrey Steinberg, a top LaRouche lieutenant on trial in Boston. "There are too many coincidences here."

LaRouche group lawyers say the proposed infiltration was part of a larger government campaign to destroy his organization.

The prosecutor in the case, Assistant U.S. Attorney John Markham, has said in the courtroom that the LaRouche group's allegations of a conspiracy against it are baseless.

LaRouche and some associates are charged with conspiring to obstruct a federal investigation into allegations of credit card fraud in connection with his 1984 presidential campaign. Last week, prosecutors in the three-month-old trial sought to show that intense pressure from LaRouche led fund-raisers to make false promises to prospective donors.

Another mystery to surface from the declassified documents in Boston was the aborted scheme to free Sakharov, in which family members would pay the Texans to help free the physicist from the Soviet Union.

Howard and Tucker said in the interview that members of the Sakharov family advanced them \$20,000 in October 1984 as the initial payment in a planned \$2 million deal in which the Texans claimed they could win Sakharov's release by using highly sensitive intelligence information as leverage against the Soviets.

Efrem Yankelevich, a Sakharov in-law and resident of Newton, Mass., acknowledged that his family paid money to private intelligence operatives who claimed that they could help free Sakharov, but re-

fused to say how much money or whether Howard and Tucker were party to the deal.

Yankelevich also revealed that in late 1984 or early 1985 he met with LaRouche at his estate near Leesburg in an effort to raise money to meet the costs asked by the free-lance operatives. LaRouche seemed interested, but never contributed any money, Yankelevich said.

Howard and Tucker said that after the proposed LaRouche and Sakharov cases fell through, government representatives contacted one or both of them to do a variety of jobs on the government's behalf: to investigate Libyan money laundering in Europe, to learn about alleged terrorist camps based in

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Mexico, and to share their findings with the chief counsel for Vice President Bush.

The men said the federal government has cast them unfairly as renegades who manipulated the government for personal gain. Also, they have filed suit in U.S. Claims Court in the District against the Customs Service, claiming they are owed \$1.4 million from an aborted sting operation in the early 1980s against an alleged international arms merchant.

"They call us bounty hunters," said Howard. "There is nothing that we have ever done that we weren't requested to do" by the government.

The FBI document revealed in the Boston case takes a different view: "It is the opinion of [FBI agents] that [retired Army Sgt. Maj. Fred] Lewis, Howard and Tucker will sell information to any and all U.S. agencies. Once they have provided the information, they will then attempt to sell it to other agencies."

Howard and Tucker said the proposed LaRouche and Sakharov dealings were arranged through the same contact, F. Keith Adkinson, the director of Democrats for Reagan in the 1980 campaign and a former attorney for the two Texans. Adkinson has declined to comment on the alleged events.

Howard said he met Adkinson in September 1984 on a hunting trip in Texas, where the two men hit it off. Within several weeks, they were discussing the possibility of forming a company together, Howard said, with the attorney using his political connections and the

Texans their intelligence background to win business from corporations and governments.

A prospective firm, never actually formed, was to be called Mangudai International. A brochure for this proposed venture explained that the group took its name from a select cadre in Genghis Khan's army of fighting men "who loved death and the proximity of death, not because of any particular reason, but simply because they were born that way."

The document stated that Mangudai "is not a traditional security firm or international investigating firm. It is a 'can do' action firm dedicated to achieving results for its clients."

Initial meetings to discuss the LaRouche and Sakharov projects took place in Adkinson's office, Howard and Tucker said.

Howard said he was considered for a possible LaRouche infiltration because he had been introduced to Steinberg earlier that year by Lewis. Lewis' name surfaced two weeks ago in the Boston LaRouche trial in a telex from retired Air Force major general Richard V. Secord to Lt. Col. Oliver L. North saying that "our man here claims Lewis has info against LaRouche."

The Texans said they were put in touch with the Sakharov family through a private detective who knew Adkinson.

Howard said the FBI seemed eager to pursue a LaRouche infiltration at their first meeting. Later, however, interest appeared to wane.

Howard said the agency failed to follow a prearranged plan to use Adkinson as the liaison to give the go-ahead for the infiltration. Instead, he said, the bureau repeatedly contacted him directly. In what Howard said is a tape of a telephone conversation with a Dallas FBI agent, a voice asks Howard if he is

"still willing to reinstitute the contacts that you had made before" with the LaRouche group.

One phone call prompted the end of both the LaRouche and Sakharov ventures, according to Howard.

In early 1985, Howard said he received a call from the LaRouche organization asking him to come to Leesburg to discuss the Sakharov case.

Howard said he was angry with the Sakharov family for spurning his instructions not to discuss their dealings with other parties. Notified of the call from the LaRouche organization, Adkinson advised Howard and Tucker to drop all dealings with LaRouche, the Texans said.

This was not the end of their dealings with or on behalf of the federal government, according to Howard and Tucker.

In later exchanges, they said, a key entre to the government was John Cupp, who was said to have played a role in the Iran-contra affair. Cupp served in the late 1970s with Lewis in the Army's elite Delta Force antiterrorist unit, Lewis said in an interview.

When Howard, Lewis and Tucker learned information that they said indicated terrorist camps were operating in Mexico, Lewis said he gave this information to Cupp, who then sent it to North via Secord. Cupp and Secord confirmed the events in interviews.

Later in May 1986, Howard, Tucker and Lewis said they met with Boyden Gray, the chief counsel to Vice President Bush, to discuss the alleged terrorist bases in Mexico.

Gray did not return telephone calls for comment. According to others familiar with the meeting, it was arranged through Gary Painter, a politically connected sheriff in Midland, Tex., where Howard and Tucker now work as part-time deputies.